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Villar: “Time to rethink status quo on CSR”

Discussed his CSR Bill (Senate Bill No. 1239), CSR efforts of Vista Land, and Villar Foundation’s green social enterprises

Senator Manny Villar, the guest of honor and award presenter at the Global CSR Summit & Global CSR Awards 2011, discussed the salient points Senate Bill No. 1239 or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Bill in his speech during a luncheon conference.

“The key, I believe is to make it not just easy, but rewarding, for companies to help. Of course, just as CSR is a natural inclination for many companies, quite a few still needs to be moved in the right direction. Thus, it is imperative to provide not just enticements but mandatory obligations within a company’s sphere of attention,” cited Villar, chairman of the Senate Committee on Trade and Commerce, said in his speech.

Villar-authored S.B. 1239, which has been sponsored in the Senate and is pending for Second Reading, seeks to make it mandatory for large taxpayers—as defined by the National Internal Revenue Code and as identified by the Bureau of Internal Revenue—to allocate a reasonable percentage of their net income towards CSR activities.

According to the senator, wealthy corporations’ CSR endeavors should supplement government efforts versus poverty and other socio-ecological problems or concerns. And that the proposed CSR Bill offers tax incentives as a positive reinforcement method for so-called do-gooders.

He added, “At the end of the day, corporations are judged not only in terms of profitability but more so on what they have achieved in uplifting people’s lives and making this world a better place to live in. Social enterprise and environmental undertaking can go hand in hand with profitability.”

The senator added however that old mindsets and concepts regarding CSR are not anymore effective in addressing new and bigger problems faced by citizens and countries globally.

“When time-tested but efficiency-challenged methods do not work anymore, it is a cue to re-think the status quo... We need innovative and cutting-edge solutions, beyond the status quo,” said Villar.

Villar also cited examples of CSR & advocacy efforts of publicly listed Vista Land and the Villar Foundation, which he both chairs.

The Villar Foundation, through its various livelihood-generation and skills training initiatives, plays an active role in helping the poor and underprivileged Filipinos. The foundation’s Las Piñas - Zapote River System Rehabilitation program has won various citations globally. It recently bested 38 other countries for the United Nation’s ‘Water for Life’ Best Practices Award.

“We have learned that in order to engage people to participate in your advocacy, you have to make it worth their while,” said Villar in his speech. Women weavers at Villar Foundation’s fully operational basket-weaving center in Las Pinas generate enough earnings to make weaving as the primary source of income/livelihood of their families.

Vista Land, on top of planting over a million trees already, is scaling up its community-based campaigns to include river and creek clearing. It also continues to use the coco nets produced by the Villar Foundation’s coco coir enterprise, for slope protection and soil erosion control requirements of its real estate developments.

Coco nets, which are 80% cheaper than cement riprap, are made out of coconut husks—erstwhile menace as these clog rivers in Las Piñas city. From garbage, these became a source of livelihood. The fiber, called coir, is extracted from the husks and made into a rope. With the use of twining and weaving machines, the womenfolk can produce coco nets.

“I always believed that the private sector – with its considerable financial and technical resources – can make a real difference in improving society and helping address the poverty problem in our country,” Villar further said.

The annual Global CSR Awards, Asia’s most prestigious recognition awards program for corporate social responsibility, is on its third year. It is organized by The Pinnacle Group International and recognizes companies for their outstanding, innovative, and world-class products, services, products and programs implemented in 2010/2011 as part of their broad CSR strategy. This year’s awarding is held in conjunction with The Global CSR Summit 2011.

The theme of the event “Beyond Sustainability” highlights the future directions of CSR. According to the organizer, “It involves going beyond narrow concepts of sustainability that aims at minimizing environmental harm and maintaining the status quo towards a new paradigm of embracing innovative and cutting edge solutions that contribute beneficially to profits, societies and the environment.”

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